



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
10 December 2009

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women

Fifty-fourth session

1-12 March 2010

Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda*

Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session and its contribution to shaping a gender perspective in the realization of the Millennium Development Goals

Statement by the International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.6/2010/1.



Statement

1. For the past 225 years, the members of the International Presentation Association have been engaged in primary, secondary, tertiary and community education. Additionally, during the last three decades, the 2,400 members of the Association in 22 countries have prioritized the needs of vulnerable people in various other ways besides education, particularly for women and girls, both in developed and less developed countries.¹

2. Some of the newer initiatives are: caring for homeless people; working among migrant communities and with refugees and asylum-seekers; celebrating indigenous cultures to promote harmony; facilitating small neighbourhood participatory structures for people to engage in decisions that affect their lives; organizing people, especially women, into self-help groups to achieve economic and political empowerment; engaging women in non-formal education, ensuring leadership skills and sustainable development; implementing innovative measures to prevent school dropouts; raising awareness concerning human rights instruments; organizing campaigns regarding rights and responsibilities; advocating for housing and land rights; networking with (other) Governments and non-governmental organizations; raising moral and ethical consciousness; forming structures for children to build their capacity and enabling them to become agents of social change; celebrating international days; promoting interfaith dialogue in conflict situations; promoting gender balance; encouraging the revitalization of (the) local indigenous cultures through the arts; helping to reduce the social stigma experienced by people living with HIV/AIDS; empowering youth by exploring ways in which their actions at the local level can create a change for the better, and enabling improved job opportunities for them; working among persons who are physically and mentally challenged; delivering resources to communities overlooked by conventional outlets and ensuring that all investments produce a social gain or benefit; and ensuring maternal and child health.

3. Working among the marginalized people of society, we encounter many hurdles to promoting a society of "equality, development and peace".² Our members enumerate the following impediments: the absence of inclusive participatory structures linked to decision-making; the failure to recognize the right of all people to participate in decisions which affect their lives; the failure to promote the regeneration and empowerment of local communities; stigma and discrimination in the areas of gender, caste, culture, religion, illness, illiteracy and disability; the high incidence of women having no financial and economic status and, as such, being dependent on men; and negligence towards the girl child in the form of female infanticide and feticide, abandonment, child marriage and school dropout rates among girls. Others include: the lack of basic amenities and infrastructure; the unequal distribution of wealth; lack of access to quality education; the lack of birth registrations and subsequent cases of people living without citizenship; communication difficulties; the culture of violence; economic stress; the number of undocumented immigrants; family disintegration; corruption at all levels; the lack of local investment in the national economic structure; the outsourcing of jobs;

¹ www.ipa.ozehosting.com

² *Agreed Conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women on the Critical Areas of Concern of the Beijing Platform for Action 1996-2005* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.06.IV.3).

instances of land-grabbing, the unbridled exploitation of natural resources at the expense of local communities; consumerism and the loss of a spiritual sensitivity.

4. The empowerment of women is the main focus of the Beijing Platform for Action. Knowledge is power. Basic education and legal empowerment of the vulnerable protects people from poverty, discrimination, violence and insecurity. In order to remove impediments and to enable the active participation of women and girls in decisions that affect their lives, they need to have legal knowledge and inclusion in participatory structures to ensure that they are able to exercise their rights and responsibilities.

5. In the words of Irene Khan, Secretary-General of Amnesty International:

Human rights are guaranteed by international law and it is through laws that a state assigns and apportions the duties that must be met to give effect to human rights. Laws are an essential step in enforcing rights. ... Good laws, fairly administered, can transform societies ... I believe that the best way to do that is to empower people to claim their rights and to engage with the institutions that set and administer laws. This approach is called legal empowerment. It is a bottom-up effort to arm those living in poverty with knowledge of their rights so that they can effectively engage with official institutions.³

6. The International Presentation Association makes the following recommendations, asking that Governments:

(a) Provide education so that people can understand the different human rights instruments and how they can be used to benefit individuals and communities in order that policies that promote human dignity do not stay on paper. Put monitoring mechanisms in place to disclose policies to the concerned people;

(b) Ensure a bottom-up education process which provides women and girls with knowledge of their rights so that they are empowered to engage with legal institutions;

(c) Introduce forums for political, social, religious and economic decision-making to grass-roots levels by means of local consultative and inclusive neighbourhood organizations.⁴ It is imperative that such forums remain small, face-to-face and community-based at every level so that the voices of the marginalized and/or weak do not get drowned out and lost, and thus go unheard, and that the people living in poverty remain voiceless. Ensure that such neighbourhood forums are federated at various levels of governance for wider reach and impact;

(d) Promote partnerships of women, children, youth, people with disabilities, indigenous people, older people and migrants through their community-based neighbourhood forums so that all are involved in the process of becoming active citizens;

(e) Develop national policies to ensure the protection of the fundamental rights and basic living conditions of internally displaced people, in particular maternal and child health from conception. Treaties or agreements on the respect for and dignified treatment of immigrants are essential. Laws/regulations/government

³ Irene Khan, *The Unheard Truth: Poverty and Human Rights* (New York, W.W. Norton and Company, 2009).

⁴ www.ncnworld.org.

information should be available in various languages and/or be made available through translation services;

(f) Ensure microfinancing for vulnerable people, enabling sustainable livelihood security across the world. The situation and the needs of vulnerable groups need to be recognized in government policies. Over-indebted people need to be guaranteed access to basic banking services; financial education and advice should be developed; and the social responsibility of financial institutions should be encouraged and monitored;

(g) Ensure that women, who are engaged in every sector of life, are equally represented at all levels of bureaucracy and in government departments in order that there may be a proper balance of men and women in the workplace.

Note: The present statement is endorsed by the Company of the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council.



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Statement by Education International, International Trade Union Confederation and Public Services International, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.6/2010/1



Statement

Women in the global economy in a time of crisis

Introduction: Impact of multiple crises on women

1. The fifty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women in 2010 provides an invaluable opportunity to assess progress made and remaining challenges in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 15 years after its adoption in 1995. For the global trade union movement, which will be represented at the Commission on the Status of Women by Education International (EI), the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and Public Services International (PSI), there is hardly cause for celebration. We express our deep concern at the plight of millions of working women caught up in a set of global and multiple crises that are not of their making but nevertheless affect their chances to live decent lives in dignity, equity and freedom from poverty. After being hit by the food and energy crises in the second quarter of 2008, they suffered the impacts of the financial crisis which peaked in September 2008, precipitating a veritable employment crisis. In addition, the ongoing climate crisis is slowly taking its toll.

2. These multiple food, financial, employment and climate crises have wiped out a good portion of the gains made in achieving the Millennium Development Goals and have had disproportionately negative effects on women, increasing their poverty and food insecurity and limiting their access to decent jobs, affordable, quality education, health and reproductive services, water and other basic social services. These crises have also clearly undermined national policies aimed at reducing gender inequalities and equities.

The employment, food and climate dimensions of the crisis

3. Despite some recent assertions by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) that the worst of the crisis will soon be over and despite forecasts of a pick-up in the growth of the global economy, the International Labour Organization (ILO) has estimated that worldwide unemployment will rise by 50 million by the end of 2009, bringing total global unemployment to the highest level ever on record. The number of working poor, those earning less than \$2 a day, will rise to 200 million. Given the structured and multiple discriminations faced by women as workers in precarious, lower-paid, underpaid, atypical jobs which they combine with caregiving roles, the employment crisis is affecting them disproportionately. With the shrinking of public sector budgets as a result of the crisis, they are left to shoulder an even greater burden of household care and social provisioning activities, without income or social compensation.

4. The export-led model of growth prescribed by the international financial institutions for the developing countries has resulted in the dismantling of the domestic food-producing sector in many countries and, coupled with speculation in food and other commodities, has led to food scarcity and rising prices for staple food items. Climate change and increasing drought have further worsened food insecurity and water scarcity, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. These factors have had severe impacts on rural food producers, the majority of whom are women, and have affected their capacity to feed their families. Levels of malnutrition in low-income countries have risen dramatically, prompting the United Nations

Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme to step up their food relief programmes in poor and vulnerable communities. The estimated number of the hungry has risen to 1 billion, the majority of those affected being women and children. A total of 1.3 billion people lack access to basic health-care services, while 100 million people are driven into poverty every year by health-care costs.

Globalization and women's employment

5. Globalization has no doubt opened up new opportunities for women's employment, both in the manufacturing and services sectors, yet, women still have difficulty accessing employment, compensation and job mobility opportunities commensurate with their educational and skills levels. Gender plays a critical role in determining the value of work and the pay of women workers in the global health workforce and other social sectors. Historically, gender-based pay inequities are based on the notion that a woman's primary role is home-based, namely, caring for her family and tending to household chores. Women's roles in the workplace are thus seen as an extension of their roles in the home and pay structures are often determined accordingly. Pay inequity therefore remains a persistent problem for working women. No country in the world has achieved pay equity, defined as equal pay for equal work or work of equal value. The pay gap in some industrialized countries, such as the Nordic countries, is now 12 per cent, but in many countries it can be upwards of 50 per cent.

6. Working women are at the lowest end of global value chains, gaining little value added for home-based work, such as making carpets, garments and beady cigarettes. Export-led growth and export processing zones have become an important tool for development growth, with mixed results in terms of impacts on young women, who make up the majority of the workforce. Young women often work under sweat shop conditions and are victims of sexual harassment. Their basic right to join unions and benefit from the workers' protection guaranteed by collective agreements is denied. In many developing countries, a majority of working women (over 70 per cent), are employed in the informal economy as self-employed rural producers, urban retailers in markets or street vendors. Their wages and work conditions are precarious. The informal sector often is not covered by national labour legislation and women working in this sector are denied their basic workers' rights.

7. Unpaid care work is a major contributing factor to gender inequality and women's poverty. In many African countries, the HIV/AIDS pandemic has increased and intensified women's unpaid care work and further reduced their chances of securing paid, productive work.

Investing in education as a human right

8. Investing in education as a human right is key to restored growth and sustainable development. The acute shortage of qualified and trained teachers, especially in the developing world, must be overcome. Given increasing enrolment levels, about 2.4 million teachers (1.2 million new teacher posts) will be needed between 2007 and 2015 in sub-Saharan Africa alone, to achieve universal primary education. The achievement of quality public education is challenged by a number of factors: lack of training and professional development, growing recruitment on a contractual basis, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, increasing natural disasters due to

climate change, conflicts resulting in fragility and attacks on teachers, students and educational institutions.

9. Addressing these challenges calls for an integrated approach, with policies that increase access to education for girls and boys from all social backgrounds and enhance inclusion and quality at all levels and in all settings. Policies must build on a platform of investing in equity in education that combines large-scale recruitment with appropriate pre-service education and ongoing in-service training for teachers. It must include strong and effective leadership in schools, proper working conditions and relevant curricular and teaching resources that enable committed caring professional teachers to do the job well and must include all children in quality education.

10. Educating girls is the most effective and efficient development tool. Educated girls are able to negotiate having a smaller number of children, who, in turn, are healthier and better educated. Educated women play an increasingly active economic and political role at the local and national levels.

Redressing chronic under-investment in public services

11. Chronic under-investment in public services in both industrialized and developing countries remains a significant barrier to the social and economic emancipation and empowerment of women. Women, especially, rely on the availability of quality public health, social care, childcare, water and energy distribution services. Where States fail to provide adequate public health and care services, the burden falls heavily on women to compensate for their non-availability. Universal access to quality public services is key to achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

12. Across the world, the public sector is an important employer of women. In many cases, it is the single largest employer of women outside the informal economy. Yet occupational segregation, undervaluation of women's work and the increasingly precarious nature of public sector jobs (through the use of outsourcing, short-term contracts, informal subcontracting and the indiscriminate use of temporary recruitment agencies) are factors inhibiting the true economic empowerment and advancement of women.

Recommendations

13. The dominant neo-liberal economic model of growth through skewed capital accumulation needs to give way to a social model of growth, with shared prosperity through decent work and gender equality at the heart of decent work. This must happen through a process of transformative change. Women must be active agents in this process of change, taking their places at the leadership and decision-making levels in global and national decision-making bodies and in the trade unions.

14. The policy and normative framework for gender equality and women's empowerment is set out in a number of instruments, and these should underpin the policies and programmes aimed at restoring growth, with equity, in global and national economies. The following are of paramount importance in this regard:

(a) The Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women;

(b) The ILO Global Jobs Pact, adopted by the ninety-eighth session of the International Labour Conference (June 2009), which proposes a set of policy measures that countries should adopt to address the crisis, with a focus on employment creation, social protection, social dialogue and workers' rights at work, in keeping with the four strategic objectives of the Decent Work Agenda;

(c) The ILO resolution concerning gender equality at work, adopted by the ninety-eighth session of the International Labour Conference (June 2009), which asserts that international labour standards are essential for promoting gender equality in the world of work, and in that context, the importance of the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100), the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1951 (No. 111), the Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 175), the Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183), the Part-Time Work Convention, 1996 (No. 177) and the Home Work Convention, 1996 (No. 177). In this context, economic and social policies must integrate the conventions that create a framework for gender equality such as the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87) and the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98);

(d) Governments should further promote ILO Recommendation No. 198 on the Employment Relationship and adapt the scope of relevant legislation to cover all workers in order to guarantee effective protection for all workers who are in the context of an employment relationship, including those in precarious or atypical forms of employment. Legislative gaps that leave women and children without legal protection and enjoyment of their full human and labour rights should be identified and eliminated;

(e) Governments must invest significantly in public health and social care to make it a cornerstone of economic recovery plans;

(f) Governments must invest significantly in public health and social care, including child and elderly care and public water and energy services, as tools for achieving gender equality and mitigating the effects of the global economic crisis;

(g) It is important that policy-formulation and implementation at the global, national and local levels be developed through multi-stakeholder consultations involving trade unions and workers' representatives, to ensure that gender equality and decent work policies and their implementation inform all

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Statement submitted by the International Women's Health Coalition, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

Statement

1. Five years remain to achieve the goals set out in the Declaration and Platform for Action agreed to at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. The Platform for Action provides the foundation needed to achieve the eight Millennium Development Goals. When Governments invest in women and girls and make their health and well-being central to their policies and programmes, they create more just and prosperous societies. The Platform for Action puts the respect and fulfilment of women's human rights, including to their sexual and reproductive health and their reproductive rights, at the centre of international policy.
2. Women's health is one of the pillars of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. At the 2009 session of the Commission on Population and Development,

* E/CN.6/2010/1.



Member States reaffirmed their commitments to achieving universal access to reproductive health (Millennium Development Goal target 5 (b)), recognized the disproportionate vulnerability of women and girls to HIV/AIDS and committed themselves to protecting girls and women from HIV through sexual and reproductive health services and education that promotes gender equality. These commitments must be acted upon immediately and reinforced through the Beijing review process.

3. Let us all commit to three core actions in the next five years:

(a) Implementing comprehensive sexual and reproductive health programmes and ensuring that women and adolescents have access to quality and affordable services;

(b) Strengthening health systems to ensure equitable access to these services, as well as health information and sexuality education, particularly for the largest-ever generation of young people;

(c) Investing in policies and programmes and legislative and judiciary actions that give women and girls access to economic resources, skills training and social support and that protect their right to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination and violence.¹

4. There is no more important investment to be made: Only healthy women whose human rights are protected can be fully productive workers and effective participants in their country's political processes. Only when women are healthy and empowered can they raise and educate healthy children — these are the building blocks of stable societies and growing economies, and an imperative in their own right.

¹ *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II, para. 96.